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# RACIAL DISPARITIES IN MILITARY INCARCERATION RATES: AN OVERVIEW AND RESEARCH STRATEGY

by

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#### Introduction

For some time now, Department of Defense (DoD) officials, civil rights activists, and researchers have been concerned about the discrepancy in discipline and incarceration rates between black and white men in the military services. Despite recent declines in overall discipline rates for all races, black service members continue to receive punishments at about twice the rate of their white counterparts (Tong & Jaggers, 1992). Tong and Jaggers (1992) present a chronology that traces some key events and research between 1969 and the present. Though formal research efforts within the services have not been as intensive during the last several years, recent media reports (e.g., Timms & McGonigle, 1991) and an April 1992 conference (1992 UCMJ Conference) at the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI), Patrick Air Force Base, Florida, mark renewed interest in the area and portend expanded research efforts.

The work of Tong and Jaggers (1992) provides a good summary of the issues and findings thus far. In addition, the results of the conference (summarized in Figure 1) help bring additional focus to specific research concerns. The purpose of the present paper is to extend these previous efforts by accomplishing the following:

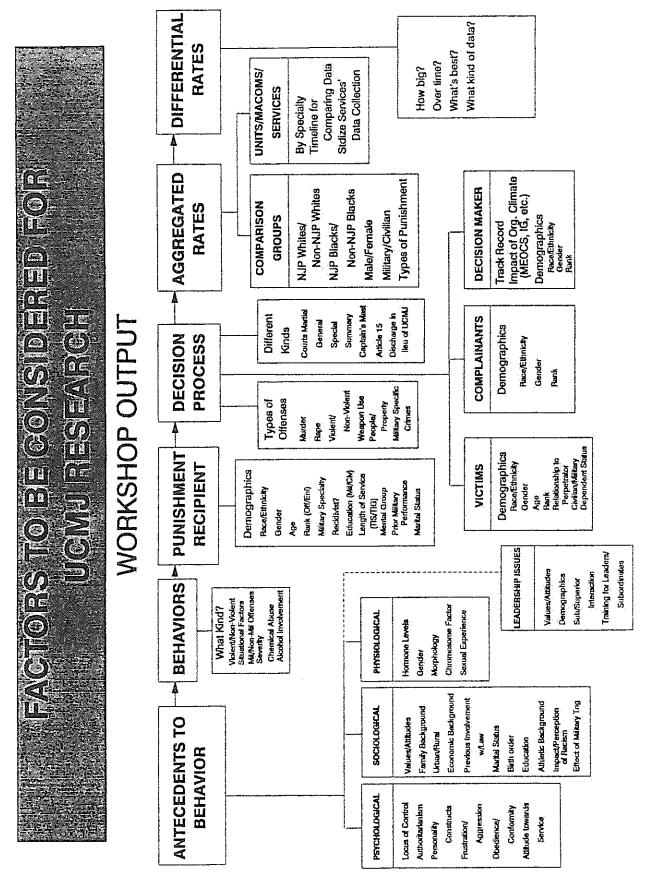
- (1) Develop an overall model (the "Tree") that summarizes significant research issues and helps bring further focus to potential research.
- (2) Propose an initial research effort to address one of the more promising hypotheses, with a goal of encouraging the services to take steps that will reduce the disparity in discipline between black and white men.

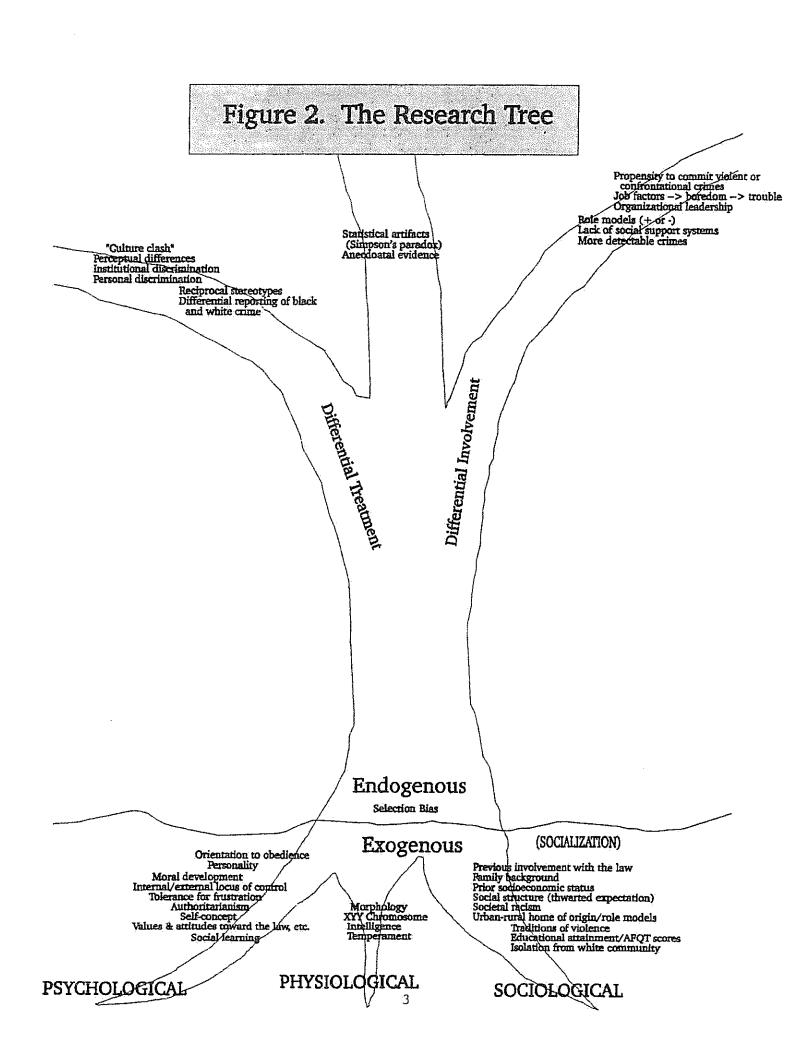
#### Overall Model - "The Tree"

To establish a framework for organizing hypotheses that might explain the disparity between black and white disciplinary rates, the author has chosen to use the tree as an analogy. This choice was inspired by a discussion with Colonel Ronald M. Joe (USA), current commandant of DEOMI, who likened the proliferation of research hypotheses to the development of a tree. The analogy is designed to present a simple model that summarizes the current research and points the way for future research. The author makes no claim that the model is exhaustive; other factors may be involved that are not considered here. Furthermore, the reader should consider the possibility that the disparities are not simply explained; in all likelihood, multiple factors, operating in concert, are involved. Some introductory explanation of the tree model may be helpful. The reader may wish to refer to Figure 2

In identifying possible causes of the disparity, several researchers distinguish between factors that are external and those that are internal to the military system (e.g., Butler & Holmes, 1981; Nordlie et al., 1979). As distinguished by Butler and Holmes (1981), these factors will be referred to as exogenous and endogenous. In the analogy, exogenous factors are those that occur below the surface (i.e., in the root structure, unseen to those who examine the tree); endogenous factors are those that are part of the military system (i.e., the trunk, branches, etc., which are observable within the military).

At the interface between the exogenous and endogenous variables (ground level) is the interaction between the two types. For example, biases in selection based on characteristics of individuals who seek entry (exogenous) and the rules for selection established by the services (endogenous) may interact to differentially select blacks who are more likely to have disciplinary problems and whites who are less likely to have problems.





Above ground level are the trunk and branches. These represent endogenous factors that may explain the disparity in punishments. Though these factors are seen within the military, they may nonetheless be direct results of exogenous variables. For example, a propensity to commit certain types of crimes may be due to socialization outside the military and not to characteristics of military life; early socialization has powerful and long-term effects that would not be easily overcome by a few months of military service, especially if resocialization to a military culture did not occur rapidly.

With the basics of the analogy in mind, we elaborate to include the specifics.

#### Exogenous Factors - The Roots and Soil

As the roots of a tree draw support for the trunk and branches from the soil, the soil of society, differential prior experiences, and individual differences may support the disparity between black and white punishment levels within the military services. The exogenous factors might be considered as having their influence through three main roots: psychological, physiological, and sociological. The psychological root includes such things as personality and attitudinal structure; the physiological includes genetic and physical differences; the sociological includes factors such as social structure and socioeconomic status. These three major categories were identified at the 1992 UCMJ Conference. Hypothesized exogenous influences that could lead to the disparity in punishment within the services are considered for each root.

#### The Psychological Root

Some authors have suggested psychological differences between black and white men that may lead to differential involvement of black men in the military justice system. In many cases these differences are merely conjectures; research has not confirmed either that the differences exist or that they lead to disparate criminal activity. However, exploring such variables to determine whether differences exist and how the variables affect criminal behavior may lead to insights concerning differences between black and white men in involvement with the military justice system.

Nordlie et al. (1979) interviewed and surveyed a wide range of military personnel involved with military justice in the Army. The sources included implementers of the military justice system (i.e., first sergeants, commanders, military police, judges, etc.), prisoners, and

ordinary soldiers. Among suggested causes was a difference in orientation to obedience and authority. Though there were some differences among black/white prisoners and nonprisoners on this variable, there was not strong support for the hypothesis that racial differences in attitude toward authority lead to differential involvement with the military justice system.

Laufer and Day (1983) compiled a series of papers suggesting several psychological factors that may lead to criminal activity. Among these factors are personality (e.g., personality factors that differ between criminal and noncriminal, such as interpersonal maturity, criminality, character structure, etc.) and moral development.

Another specific psychological factor hypothesized at the 1992 UCMJ Conference is tolerance for frustration. This factor would impact criminal behavior through the frustration-aggression relationship. Self-esteem and self-concept (Nordlie et al., 1979; Hogan & Jones, 1983; Berkowitz, 1980) have been proposed as influencing criminality. Also suggested as a key factor is values and attitudes toward the law, society, the military, etc. (Nordlie et al., 1979; Huba & Bentler, 1983).

Finally, researchers and theorists posit social learning as a psychological variable related to criminal behavior (e.g., Monahan & Splane, 1980; Hogan & Jones, 1983). Social learning emphasizes behaviors that are established by observation, imitation, and direct reinforcement from others. Consequently, the social learning view is highly related to the sociological perspective to be discussed later.

#### The Physiological Root

A number of biological (e.g., Mednick & Christiansen, 1977) and sociobiological (e.g., Mednick, 1980; Mednick et al., 1977) explanations of criminal behavior have been proposed. These explanations include reference to genetic variables such as temperament, the XYY chromosome factor, and intelligence. Some have tried to correlate various body forms (morphology) and crime (see Haskell & Yablonsky, 1983, for a summary of this generally unfruitful line of research). The most promising of the physiological studies are the sociobiological approaches, which consider the interaction between genetic influences (e.g., temperament) and societal influences (e.g., socialization).

A favored methodology in the physiological studies is to compare behaviors of dizygotic (fraternal) twins, who share similar environments but different genetic makeup, and monozygotic (identical) twins, who share essentially the same genetic makeup, to look for greater similarity in criminal activity among monozygotic twins. Such studies have some methodological problems, but in general lend some support to the proposal there is a physiological (genetic) basis for a tendency toward criminal activity (Christiansen, 1977).

The XYY chromosome studies generated a great deal of excitement (and controversy) when first introduced. They raised the prospect that males who had an extra male chromosome (the second Y) were genetically more aggressive and more likely to be found in prisons. However, subsequent analyses tend to discount the XYY syndrome as a cause of aggressiveness (Witkin et al., 1976).

#### The Sociological Root

The sociological root includes those variables that are a function of society and the socialization process. These variables are quite powerful in determining behavior and are generally considered to have great impact on criminal behavior (Blumstein, 1982). Although the general process of socialization is pervasive, certain specific aspects have been suggested as relating to increased representation of black males in the military justice system. Some of these factors are summarized below.

Previous involvement (i.e., before entering the service) with the law and legal system has been suggested as a predictor of subsequent disciplinary difficulty in the military services (Nordlie et al., 1979; Flyer, 1990). Some researchers point to family background, especially non-traditional, unstructured homes where discipline was lacking or single-parent homes (e.g., Nordlie et al., 1979; Horne, 1988; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985; McCord, 1980). Another suggested cause is <u>prior</u> socioeconomic status (e.g., Nordlie et al., 1979; Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985; Morris, 1988; Curtis, 1980), where deprivation leads to antisocial behavior and criminality. Related factors are social structure variables (Merton, 1938; Nordlie et al., 1979; Silberman, 1978), for example thwarted expectations of an improving place in society, and societal racism (Curtis, 1980; McNeely & Pope, 1981).

Another possible contributor is <u>urban</u> versus rural home of origin and the concomitant role models associated with these two different environments (Nordlie et al., 1979). The supposition is that the rural home does not engender the same "street-wise" behaviors that may lead to confrontations with military discipline. Some researchers propose a tradition of violence as a cause of subsequent criminality (Nordlie et al., 1979; Haskell & Yablonsky, 1983; Curtis, 1980; Gastil, 1971; Wolfgang, 1959). Some suggest educational attainment and Armed Forces

Qualification Test scores as indicators (Flyer, 1990; Nordlie et al., 1979; Polan & Thomas, 1985). Morris (1988) believes some criminal behavior may be due to the growing black underclass and increasing isolation of black individuals from the white community.

The sociological root is replete with possible explanations for differences in black/white involvement with the justice system. If, indeed, some of these variables differentially affect black and white crime rates, there is a distinct possibility of the interaction of exogenous and endogenous factors to select black men for military service who are more likely than selected white men to have trouble with the military justice system. Such selection bias may be an inadvertent result of (for example) less complete screening of black men with regard to prior criminal activity. In the tree model, selection bias occurs at the juncture between the exogenous and endogenous factors (i.e., ground level). We now turn our attention to the trunk and branches of the tree: those variables that are internal to the services and that may explain the disparity in black and white discipline rates.

### Endogenous Factors - The Trunk, Forks, and Branches

Endogenous variables operate within the military system itself. Though they are internal to the services, they may interact with any of the exogenous factors previously discussed. Our present focus is primarily limited to research that has been conducted within the services. The endogenous factors may be conveniently divided into those related to differential treatment (i.e., discrimination, etc.) and differential involvement (i.e., black males actually commit more acts that legitimately result in punishment). In addition to these major forks in the trunk, a third fork might be considered for artifactual effects (e.g., the rates of punishment for blacks and whites are to some degree due to anomalies in the reporting or datagathering process). First, we consider the possibility of differential treatment.

#### The Differential Treatment Fork

A frequent explanation for the higher representation of black men in the military justice system is discrimination. This explanation presumes prejudice on the part of various individuals throughout the disciplinary chain. Since most of the decision-makers in the disciplinary system are white males, it is a logical hypothesis that historical societal prejudices work to the disadvantage of black men. Several specific versions of how differential treatment might occur have been proposed.

The output from the 1992 UCMJ Conference summarizes a number of points at which discrimination might occur within the military justice system. Concerns over possible racism in the military justice system have been raised over a span of at least 20 years by the NAACP (Wilkins, 1971), the Civil Rights Commission (McGonigle & Tims, 1991), and the Congressional Black Caucus (McGonigle, 1991). These concerns have been raised based on statistical disparities between black and white punishments and reports of discrimination from various individuals and groups within the services.

Researchers have also considered racism as a possible explanation, either in reality or as perceived by service members (e.g., Butler & Holmes, 1981; Moskos, 1991, quoted by Matthews in the Army Times; Morris, 1988, in civilian cases; Nordlie et al., 1979; Horne, 1988). Discrimination based on race may have several sources. For example, discrimination may be due to "culture clash" (Nordlie et al., 1979). Culture clash may occur when the military culture (primarily based on white traditions) conflicts with a black subculture. The predominant and more powerful culture would be expected to exercise controls to resolve conflicts on its own terms.

Another source may be <u>perceptual</u> <u>differences</u> (Nordlie et al., 1979; Butler & Holmes, 1981; Horne, 1988), where black and white members have different perceptions of what behaviors are serious or punishable offenses. <u>Institutional discrimination</u>, where rules and policies of the military institution have unintentional discriminatory effects, is also a possibility (1992 UCMJ Conference).

Another potential source is <u>personal</u> discrimination (Nordlie et al., 1979; Horne, 1988; Butler & Holmes, 1981). Personal discrimination could occur when individual prejudices of the implementers of the military justice system (i.e., first sergeants, commanders, military police, judges, etc.) influence their decisions. Finally, <u>reciprocal stereotyping</u> (Nordlie et al., 1979), where white implementers "expect" criminal behavior from black service members, and black members "expect" prejudicial treatment from white implementers, can exacerbate confrontations and lead to charges where an incident might otherwise be handled at a lower level and dismissed.

#### The Differential Involvement Fork

An alternative explanation for the disparity in discipline rates is the hypothesis of differential involvement. This explanation posits that black males, for whatever reasons (e.g., perhaps due to the exogenous factors discussed previously), commit more crimes and should therefore be overrepresented in the military justice system. From this perspective, the system operates fairly; discrimination within the services is not the primary cause of the disparity.

Several factors internal to the services could contribute to differential involvement of black men in various types of offenses. For example, there is some evidence that black members have a greater propensity to commit violent or confrontational crimes (Nordlie et al., 1979; Polan & Thomas, 1985). Such crimes are personal and more detectable and, therefore, more likely to be reported with a positive identification of the offender. Consider, for example, the difference between a property crime, such as stealing tools from the government, and a personal crime, such as assaulting another military member in the barracks. The property crime may not even be noticed for quite some time, making it more difficult to apprehend the offender; the personal crime involves at least one eye witness (the victim) and immediate detection.

An interesting proposal by Nordlie et al. (1979) is that some differential involvement may be due to job factors. Black men, on average, have lower entrance test scores than white men. They consequently are more likely to have military jobs that are less interesting and lack intrinsic motivation (i.e., are unenriched). Such jobs can lead to low satisfaction, boredom, and, perhaps, dysfunctional behaviors resulting in disciplinary problems. A related explanation is a lack of effective organizational leadership (1992 UCMJ Conference). This hypothesis receives some support from the finding by Home (1988) that within one service (at least) there is a wide difference in the disparity between black and white punishments based on the individual units observed. A corollary of this hypothesis is that the role models for black military members could influence behavior either in a positive or negative way (Horne, 1988). If appropriate role models are not available, greater disciplinary infractions may accrue. Also, lack of appropriate social support systems within the command (Horne, 1988) may contribute to greater involvement by black males in behaviors that result in disciplinary action.

#### The Artifactual Effects Fork

A third endogenous explanation is that some of the disparity is due to statistical and reporting artifacts. The reasoning is that with proper handling of statistical reports, especially the approach used to aggregate statistics from level to level, some of the disparity would be revealed as nonexistent (Horne, 1988). One such artifact is Simpson's Paradox. Horne (1988) provides an example of this phenomenon, and he reports evidence that it may be operative (at least within one service). The example is as follows:

#### NJP Statistics for Command X

Group	Punished	Not Punished	Punishment Rate
		Unit X1	
Black White	1 9	59 431	1.7% 2.0%
		Unit X2	
Black White	38 65	162 235	19.0% 21.7%
	С	ommand X Overall	
Black White	39 74	221 666	15.0% 10.0%

As may be seen in this example, the rates of punishment within the two subunits of Command X indicate no disparity when considered separately (in fact, in each unit the rate for whites is slightly more than the rate for blacks). However, when the statistics are aggregated at the overall command level, there is an apparent 50% overrepresentation of black members in punishment rates. The paradox occurs when there are large differences in the proportions of black and white members in various subunits of an organization. The extent to which this occurs is not known, but Horne (1988) presented evidence that it does occur. Others have raised concerns about statistical procedures as well (e.g., Davison, 1972). Horne (1988) has recommended, along with others (e.g., 1992 UCMI Conference; Polan & Thomas, 1985), that statistical procedures be scrutinized and standardized across services.

Others have suggested that the degree of disparity has also been overestimated, especially by black service members, based on anecdotal reports of incidents. Both Horne (1988) and Hart (1978) present evidence that disparities may be perceived when there is no statistical difference between black and white punishment rates within a unit.

It is the author's speculation that such artifactual problems are relatively minor and not sufficient to account for a large portion of the overall disparity. These problems should be investigated and cleared up, however.

Having examined the tree from its roots to its branches, the logical question is where do we go from here? The answer to that question, in large measure, depends on how one frames the problem. The present author offers a starting place that is based on the tradition of action research.

#### Discussion and Research Proposal

Considerable research has been devoted to this issue, both in the civilian and military communities. A major question yet to be answered is how much of the disparity in discipline rates between black and white military members is due to exogenous factors and how much is due to endogenous factors? Furthermore, it is not clear how much is due to differences in treatment (i.e., discrimination) versus differences in involvement for black and white members. Certainly these issues are legitimate research concerns and should be addressed. Even when we find the answers, however, we will not solve the problem. Some form of intervention will be required to correct the disparity. As a next step, the present author advocates an action research program (based on the tree model) that makes some assumptions, based on current evidence, and tests these assumptions by implementing interventions that might reasonably be expected to reduce the disparity.

Given the current evidence, where should an intervention program attack the problem? From the present analysis, it appears the most fruitful intervention program should be aimed at overcoming effects of the sociological root. This conclusion is based on several considerations. First, the effects of the sociological factors are well supported by research and theory (see review above). Second, there is evidence that at least a substantial portion of the disparity may be accounted for by differential criminal involvement of black and white males. This difference in involvement appears to be rooted in socialization differences between black and white males and persists even when possible discrimination is factored out (see, for example, Hindelang, 1978; Blumstein, 1982; Petersilia, 1983; Morris, 1988). This is not to deny differential treatment as another source of the disparity. As in most behavioral phenomena, causes may be multiple. However, discrimination, per se, does not appear to be the strongest contributor to the disparity (Blumstein, 1982; Morris, 1988). Third, there is only weak support for the hypothesis that the bulk of the disparity is due to discrimination

within the military justice system (1992 UCMJ Conference; Horne, 1988; Tong & Jaggers, 1992; Nordlie et al., 1979; Polan & Thomas, 1985). Fourth, assuming a strong influence by the sociological root implies an intervention approach that is feasible. If a large part of the problem is due to socialization, then the military can use educational approaches to help resocialize incoming members and sensitize those who administer the military justice system to possible effects of exogenous factors on individual behavior.

With these factors in mind, the author proposes that the next research step should be to design an experiment to test the effects of early intervention to resocialize black males to the military system. This intervention should be designed to make incoming black males aware of the differential effects their behaviors may have in the military society (as opposed to the civilian society from which they came). For example, where confrontation may be an effective strategy in the inner city, it may be interpreted as disrespect and insubordination in the military service. If those most at risk to misread the military system (i.e., more often black males, due to typical differences in social factors between black and white recruits) receive effective orientation to military society, they may modify their behavior and avoid trouble with the military justice system.

The author is aware that some may consider this action research to be "victim focused." In a sense, it is, but only because it aims the intervention primarily at those who are victims of a socialization process over which they have no control. We must be clear in our thinking regarding this issue. The current proposal in no way assumes the victims (i.e., black males) are to blame. In the author's opinion, the major concern with a victim focus is the phenomenon of blaming the victim for the crime perpetrated against him or her. (The typical example is to blame a woman who is raped for "asking for it," etc.) However, to help a victim overcome his or her victimization is not discriminatory; it is in fact, the proper and moral course of action.

Perhaps an example would help clarify the point. Assume a man is walking down the street and is mugged. The attacker severely injures the man and starts to flee. Just at that moment, a passerby sees what is happening and rushes to the scene. What should the passerby do? The mugger is to blame for what has happened and should be brought to justice. Doing so may prevent future muggings and help change society. So, it would seem the passerby should chase down the mugger, perhaps seeking help along the way, and detain the mugger for the authorities. But what about the victim? If the passerby leaves the victim with his injuries, he might die. Clearly the first course of action for the passerby, no matter how much anger and disgust the criminal evokes, should be to try to help the victim survive and overcome his injuries.

The author applies the analogy to the present proposal as follows. Many black males entering the service may have been injured by sociological factors that have reduced their chances for success in the military. Though it is clear these factors are beyond their control, it is also clear that the passerby (the military system) cannot control them either. The military system should try to do what it can to help heal the victim's "injuries"; otherwise the victim's survival as an effective military member is in peril.

Having considered these background issues, let us reflect on how an experiment might be designed to implement this general line of research. The general approach is not original with the author (see Nordlie et al., 1979, for example). However, it appears not to have been implemented previously. Specifically, the following is proposed:

- (1) Design a training package that focuses on presenting behaviors that are appropriate and contrasts them with behaviors that are not appropriate in the military. A good design might be to have DEOMI (or another appropriate agent) create videotapes with vignettes depicting such scenes and showing the consequences of inappropriate behaviors (i.e., charges, punishment, incarceration, etc.). This strategy will be called the inoculation approach. A second package might be designed around the cultural assimilation model proposed by Landis et al. (1976). This model will be known as the assimilation approach. Both approaches could be used in the experiment, and the effectiveness of each compared to the other and to nontreatment control groups. Figure 3 shows the basic experimental design.
- (2) Implement the training packages either in the pre-entry stage or at the earliest possible point in a recruit's assimilation. Six randomly assigned, demographically matched groups should be used: black and white male control groups (receiving no special training); black and white male inoculation training groups; and black and white male cultural assimilator training groups. Training should be implemented as a normal part of the assimilation process, insofar as possible.

Figure 3

Experimental Design

RACIAL CONDITION* GROUP INOCULATION ASSIMILATION CONTRO				
BLACK	Х	X	0	
WHITE	x	x	0	

<sup>\*</sup>X=Treatment and observation; O=Observation only.

(3) Track the performance of the six groups over a period of at least two years to determine whether there are differences in contact with the military justice system.

From an action research perspective, a parallel effort that might enhance the effectiveness of early intervention with the black male population entering the military could be to provide sensitization training to those who implement the military justice system (including first sergeants, commanders, military police, etc.). They should be made aware of the effects of sociological factors exogenous to the military and the impact these factors may have on behaviors. Perhaps such increased awareness would temper implementers' decisions with greater wisdom at various levels within the system and help them make decisions that are culturally equitable. The effectiveness of such sensitization training should be determined through additional research.

Another possible line of research might help answer the question of differential involvement versus differential treatment for black males in the military justice system. A clever research strategy in the civilian sector tries to answer this question by examining victim reports (Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985; Hindelang, 1978). The basic approach is to consider only crimes which have a victim, contact the victims for identification of the race and gender of the perpetrator, and compare the rates reported, by race and gender, with arrest, conviction, sentencing, etc., statistics. The studies conducted thus far show a close correspondence between

victims' reports of the race of the perpetrators and overall statistics, by race, for the type of crime considered. Although not all types of crime may be considered, at least for personal crimes we may be able to determine whether black males are arrested at a discriminatory rate.

#### Summary

The present paper presents a conceptual summary and guide for research to help determine causes for the overrepresentation of black males (compared to white males) in the military justice system. A number of factors external to the military (exogenous factors: psychological, physiological, and sociological) are considered, as well as several factors internal to the military system (endogenous factors: selection bias, differential treatment, differential involvement). Based on the author's analysis of the most influential causes of the disparity, an action research proposal is presented. The research proposal focuses on overcoming the effects of exogenous sociological factors through a program of training designed to facilitate black males' socialization into the military society. Two strategies are suggested: "Inoculation" training, using videotapes, to prevent adverse interactions with those in authority within the military; and cultural assimilation and transition training to aid black males in moving from a civilian to a military culture. A parallel recommendation is to provide cultural awareness training for the implementers (at all levels) of the military justice system. It is hoped that such programs will prove effective in reducing the overrepresentation of black males in military justice actions.

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